



News Release

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***E. coli* update: new illnesses point out potential raw milk hazards**

Patients say they drank milk from Whatcom County dairy

OLYMPIA — Two recent infections with toxin-producing *E. coli* (*E. coli* O157) have been identified in Washington residents who drank raw, unpasteurized milk. The two cases confirmed this month bring the count of infections this year associated with one Bellingham dairy to eight.

Although it's legal to buy and sell raw milk in Washington, the state departments of Health and Agriculture (WSDA) remind consumers that raw milk can be dangerous.

The two new patients say they drank raw milk produced by Jackie's Jersey Milk in Whatcom County. WSDA has conducted additional testing of the firm's product, but has not found *E. coli* in the milk. WSDA continues to work with the farm to review the dairy's production and product handling practices.

The firm issued a product recall notice in February after WSDA found *E. coli* during routine sampling of the farm's raw milk. Soon after the February recall, six patients with *E. coli* infections reported drinking the dairy's product. People who were sick said they got the milk at retail stores in King, Snohomish, and Skagit counties.

Many strains of the bacteria *Escherichia coli* (abbreviated as *E. coli*) are harmless. Some, including *E. coli* O157, produce a toxin that can cause infections. Those infections may lead to severe diarrhea, stomach cramps and bloody stool. Symptoms can take up to nine days to appear, but typically begin within three or four days. People with symptoms should get medical care.

Each year, toxin-producing *E. coli* causes about 100,000 illnesses, 3,000 hospitalizations and 90 deaths in the United States. The infection can cause hemolytic uremic syndrome. It destroys red

blood cells and leads to kidney failure. Most at risk are infants, children, pregnant women, the elderly and people with compromised immune systems.

Raw milk isn't heated to kill harmful bacteria, making it riskier than pasteurized milk.

Pasteurization kills illness-causing bacteria. Raw milk can also contain other bacteria that can cause illness or threaten lives, including *Salmonella*, *Campylobacter*, and *Listeria*.

Consumers who buy raw milk should read the container's warning label carefully, and should verify the milk was produced and processed by a Washington State Department of Agriculture-licensed operation. Consumers should be aware that while licensure to sell raw milk represents a basic level of sanitation, it doesn't assure that raw milk is free of illness-producing bacteria.

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Visit the Washington Department of Health Web site at http://www.doh.wa.gov for a healthy dose of information.
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